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THE

SPIRIT'S LIFE;

A P O E M :

DELIVERED BEFORE THE LITERARY FRATERNITY, WATERTOWN COLLEGE, AND THE
PORTER RHETORICAL SOCIETY, THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, ANDOVER, AT
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BY

✓
REV. RAY PALMER.

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THE SPIRIT'S LIFE.

WHEN from her course, o'er stormy billows driven,
Some gallant ship on fatal rocks is riven,
The hapless sailor, cast upon the shore,
To see his home and native land no more,
Deems all around him desolate ; and vain
The hope that he shall e'er be glad again.
But when revolving years prolong his stay,
They steal, by slow degrees, his gloom away ;
Till used—the heart is o'er the world the same—
To call it Home,—he loves it for the name.

So is it with us all : since when exiled
From the dear spot where early Eden smiled,
Where perfect man 'mid perfect beauty trod,
And innocent, like angels, walked with God,
Strangers and friendless on the lone world thrown,
We sigh for blooming seats no more our own :

But doomed returnless, wisdom bids us prove
What ills we may but suffer, what remove :
By hard experience taught the priceless skill
From sorrow joy to draw, and good from ill,
Yet a few flowers we teach around to grow,
And though we reach not bliss, escape from wo.

We live a twofold life ; The grosser sense,
Allied to earth, must draw its life from thence ;
A life oft harassed by unfilled desire,
Whose joys are transient, and whose hopes expire :
Not by the noble mind too highly prized,
Nor yet by God appointed all despised.

The Spirit, of an essence half divine,
Hath its own proper life ; nor may resign
The high prerogative, that bids transcend
Dull sense, and make the invisible its end,
Its home the universe. It LIVES but where
It finds the PERFECT, and the TRUE, and FAIR.

Not they who eager throng the crowded mart
Where fortune waits her favors to impart ;
Nor they who sit where pleasure wreathes her bower ;
Nor they who climb the giddy heights of power ;
Nor they who curious rove from clime to clime ;
Nor they whom learning tempts to plunder time ;

Attain what may the inward thirst supply,
And gild life's moments as they hasten by :
'Tis theirs whose youth, whose manhood, and whose age
The BEAUTIFUL, the TRUE, the GOOD, engage.

Say what is Beauty, and direct us where.
What hearts may feel, but never words declare.
'T is nature's mystery ;—a silent spell,
That chains the soul like music's gifted shell.
'T is the pleased spirit's harmony ; the thrill
Of chords by unseen fingers touched with skill :
Of power to calm, when stormy passions move,
And wake the soul to tenderness and love.

Where is it, askest thou ? expand thy soul
To grasp of finite things the mighty whole :
Scan with attentive eye each part in turn ;
The stars that glitter, and the suns that burn,
Far as the assisted orb can stretch its view :
The broad expanse, where God's own finger drew
The path of moving worlds, through which they urge
Eternally their flight, nor once diverge :
The azure air—where fleecy clouds repose,
And float majestic as it ebbs and flows ;
Or kindle in the sun's departing glow ;
Or, darkly frowning, arch the mystic bow :

The sea—that moaning heaves its foaming crest,
Or sleeps unruffled, when the tempests rest:
The earth—that once accursed when sin began,
Forgetful of the wrong, still blooms for man:
Morn—when it purples all the eastern hill:
Eve—when the stars are mirrored in the rill:
All nature's noble face is bright and fair,
The smile of beauty plays for ever there.

But nicer shades the searching eye may trace;
Minuter study shows diviner grace.
Each single object, perfect in each part,
Each scene complete, with wonder fills the heart.

Exchange the busy city, or the town,
For the lone wilderness. There sit thee down
Where waves the pine amid the clear blue sky,
And greets the breathing zephyr with a sigh.
The Gothic fir, that lifts its head in pride,
Nor bows, though tempests sweep the forest wide,
Stands in still majesty. Encircling round,
A thousand names in wild disorder found,
Blend all their thousand shades of varied green,
And open far retreating glades between.
Like a fair child at play, the mountain stream
Leaps babbling by, and sparkles in the beam

That falls where parted boughs a path disclose :
Athwart the old moss oak its long arms throws,
As age bends over youth ; while o'er the brink,
The rose and lily stoop, as if to drink.
The timid fawn is there to slake his thirst :
The thrasher and the blue jay safe have nursed
Their unfledged young, and pour their clear wild notes,
That one may deem an angel chorus floats :
And flowers by God's own care unnumbered spring,
And 'mid the maze of beauty fragrance fling.

Turn next where man essays, with patient toil,
To disembowel earth ; and mark the spoil
Which forth he drags, his labor to repay.
See where the sunbeams on the crystal play,
Or fall, refracted by the brilliant gem,
Destined to grace a monarch's diadem ;
Note the bright masses of the precious ore,
Henceforth to swell the rich man's coffered store :
On all the products of the teeming mine,
Beauty is writ in characters divine.

Or, leaving nature, fix thy roving thought
On the fair works that human skill hath wrought.
Eternal Rome's proud Vatican go tread ;
Rich mausoleum of the gifted dead :

Where sculpture bids the marble bosom heave,
The lip to utter, and the eye to grieve ;
Give to the wretch Laocoon a tear ;
Or gaze in silence on the Belvidere ;
Pause where, with pencil dipped in magic dye,
Painting transcends all hues of earth and sky ;
And while thy rapt soul feels the mighty spell
Of gorgeous Titian, or bold Raphael,
That fixed in wonder, thou couldst ever wait,
Learn what the beauty genius can create.

And there is beauty on the classic page ;
Immortal product of each perished age :
Where graphic Homer, master of the lyre,
Or melts to pity, or inflames to ire :
Where Plato, half divine, intensely soars,
And wide unfathomed realms of thought explores :
Where breathes, chaste Virgil, thy sweet tuneful lay ;
Or the thronged forum owns rich Tully's sway ;
Or where Petrarca sighs in later time ;
Or Dante's numbers roll—dark—wild—sublime :
Or our own Milton, with adventurous flight,
Sweeps heaven and hell, and ' chaos and old night :'
Where gentle Addison provokes a smile,
And to fair virtue wins the heart the while ;
Or splendid Burke pours his exhaustless stream ;
Or Johnson kindles on the moral theme.

But close the eye of sense, and thou shalt find
Yet fairer forms of beauty in the mind.
The inward eye hath vision more serene ;
It sees a world no eye of sense hath seen ;
Ideal all—transcendent—ever bright :
Imagination thither bends her flight ;
Bids the charmed soul 'mid radiant forms to range,
And hues that fade not, yet for ever change ;
And there, where soft eternal sunlight gleams,
Find calm repose, and dream bright glorious dreams !

AND WHAT IS TRUTH? Thou source of truth benign,
Light in whose light we see, to say is thine !
'Tis the great sum of all thy will hath wrought ;
The antitype of THINE ETERNAL THOUGHT.

Go, grave inquirer, search the plan profound,
Of God ordained, or ever years rolled round ;
Which firmly fixed what nature's laws we call,
That bid the planet roll, the pebble fall :
That atoms join, by close attraction held,
Or sever, by repulsive force impelled ;
That send the Spring's sweet blush, the Summer's bloom,
The Autumn's riches, and the Winter's gloom ;
That all the changes of all things control,
And bind in wondrous harmony the whole.

Enter man's inmost soul ; the search pursue :
A voice, than Delphic oracle more true,
Shall utter its response, nor once deceive
What ear may listen, or what heart believe ;
Shall whisper truth by intuition taught,
Or drawn by reason from the wells of thought :
Shall bid thee to the Infinite ascend,
To God, Eternity, thy being's end ;
Reveal thee subject to the changeless throne,
And speak unending ages all thine own.

The Book of God unfold. There radiant shine,
By his own Spirit written, truths divine.
Lo ! where thick clouds and flame his way attend,
On shuddering Sinai's top the Lord descend !
While the shrill trump affrights the startled ear,
And thrills the heart, rebellious Israel hear
Man's sum of duty down to latest time,
By God's own awful voice pronounced sublime.
The harp of Prophecy, in lofty lays,
Pours the rich notes of truth in after days :
Till He whose name is Truth—bright morning star—
Bursts on the world, and spreads his beams afar !

O sacred Truth ! Say if thou may'st be found
Above, beneath, within us and around ;

Why from the many liest thou all concealed?
Why to the favored few alone revealed?
Methinks I hear thy gentle voice reply,
'Tis those alone that search with single eye:
The many, or with pride or passion blind,
But seem to seek, and therefore may not find.
The schoolman, learned, mystical, acute;
The pedant, vain, conceited, and astute;
The skeptic, ever on suspicion bent,
To evidence too weak to yield assent;
The caviller, who each argument gainsays,
Of tact or wit ambitious of the praise;
The reckless, who, if Truth or stand or fall,
Alike unheeding, never think at all;
Such, self-deluded, I forsake, to cheer
The childlike spirit, humble yet sincere.

CELESTIAL GOODNESS! may we speak thy name,
Nor feel each cheek consume with burning shame?
We've banished thee! Yet deign'st thou to return,
With them to linger who unheed or spurn?
Ah! how unlike this sombre world of crime,
Of violence, and wrath, to that fair clime,
Thy native seat, where myriad harps are strung
To hymn thy praise, and dulcet strains are sung!

Earth's hapless region, grating discords fill ;
Dark malice roams unchained, intent on ill,
And leering envy lurks in many a breast,
And reign insatiate lusts that know no rest :
Now calumny lets fly the envenomed shaft ;
Now murder grimly pours the noxious draught ;
Or strength gives weakness to rewardless toil ;
Or lawless rapine revels in its spoil ;
War fiercely waves the desolating brand,
And scatters ruin o'er a smiling land ;
And peaceful where the towering city stood,
Leaves smouldering ruins reeking human blood.

Yet Goodness hath not bid the earth farewell.
Come with me to yon lonely cot, where dwell
Want's wretched children. Pale disease is there :
The ghastly cheek and wasted limbs declare
Its mortal ravages : the fevered head
Throbs restless on the hard and cheerless bed :
It is a widow pines ; doomed to behold
Victims of hunger, nakedness and cold,
Her lonely babes ; and many a bitter tear
Weeps for them fatherless—no friend is near !
But stay. Like some kind ministering angel sent,
A gentle stranger comes, to soothe intent
The sufferer's anguish, and to bring relief
To instant woes ; while for the soul's deep grief,

She offers balm eternal love hath given,
And points the dying eye to God and Heaven !

Come listen to the pining prisoner's moan :
'Mid the deep dungeon's gloom, desponding, lone,
He lies immured, remote from cheerful day,
To noxious air and foul disease a prey.
No mother's love—no tender sister's smile—
No wife's caress—the dreary hours beguile.
Too blest might end his anguish with his breath,
Impatient chides he the slow pace of Death.
Hark ! swings the massy door with grating sound !
'T is but the warder treads his daily round :
No ! there are tones of kindness. How they roll
Like waves of blessedness o'er that crushed soul,
Long—long resigned to desolate despair !
Some Howard, breathing goodness, enters there.

Where Gunga wanders to the distant main,
Embanked by spicy grove and blooming plain,
Come sit thee down awhile. The sultry day
Is o'er ; and gorgeous twilight fades away
In the far west ; cool down the rippling stream
The perfumed breezes sweep, while every beam
The moon lets fall from the transparent sky
To greet the wave, reflected meets the eye.

And all is silent, save the measured dash
Of yonder oars, that in the soft light flash.
How beautiful ! But hark ! that piercing cry,
That tells some tortured heart's deep agony !
See—'t is a mother ! and her arm hath prest
Her cherub infant closely to her breast !
Ah ! 't is her last embrace, or e'er she throws,
And o'er the innocent the waters close !
Stay, frantic mother ! nor unclasp thine arm !
Lay not thine hand upon thy babe for harm !
A voice as if from heaven, ere yet too late,
Prevents the sacrifice—arrests the fate.
Yes ! there is one shall bid that mother care,
With nature's yearning, for the babe she bare ;
From home self-banished, and from kindred dear,
He came to light her soul, to calm her fear ;
And so he may but lift her thoughts on high,
Consents 'neath burning suns to toil and die !

If finite Goodness move thee to admire,
Thy soul shall to the perfect next aspire :
Thirst for the Infinite, resigned no more
To dwell with sin and hate, and upwards soar :
Through purer regions, worlds serenely bright,
And ranks of spotless beings, urge its flight ;
And past all things create, shall last ascend
To God Supreme, in Him the quest to end.

O come the better day, when every gale
That sweeps from heaving hill or sunny vale,
Shall sweetly breathe of purity and peace !
When passion's rage and party strife shall cease :
When Learning, from her venerated halls,
Shall send forth sons whom no fierce summons calls
To noisy conflict, that lays waste the mind,
Nor leaves one noble sympathy behind :
When, like the surges spent upon the shore,
The waves of tumult shall forget to roar :
Society grow calm ; and men begin,
Withdrawn from outward life, to live within.
That life earth's every joy shall twice endear ;
Give nature language, and the soul an ear ;
Make reason utter truth, the soul approve,
And pure affections the pure spirit move !

Ah ! who would quench the nobler spirit's fire
In sensual life—the life of low desire ?
Who spurn the holy birthright nature gave,
To be ambition's fool, and pleasure's slave ?
Let such, inglorious and perversely blind,
Grasp meaner things, and madly starve the mind ;
Ignoble let them live, and nameless die,
And ' Infamy ' be written where they lie !

But ye, whom loftier purposes impel
To choose the richer meed of living well :
Who feel the spirit's heaven-enkindled flame
Mount upward to the source from whence it came ;
And nerve your fervent souls for worthier strife,
Instinct with inward energy and life :
Ye gaze, alternate filled with hopes and fears,
Adown the vista of approaching years,
As conscious many a storm shall fierce assail,
And trembling, lest our strength or courage fail :
That ye may calm abide, when billows roll,
Commune with God—with Nature—and the Soul.
Nurture the Spirit with a Spirit's food :
Oh ! love the BEAUTIFUL—the TRUE—the GOOD !

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